

Implementation Team Conference Call

February 24, 2006

1. Greetings and Introductions.

Today's Implementation Team conference call was chaired by Jim Ruff and facilitated by Donna Silverberg. The following is a summary (not a verbatim transcript) of the topics discussed and decisions made at this meeting. Anyone with questions or comments about these notes should contact Kathy Ceballos at 503-230-5420.

2. 2006 Spring Creek Spill Issue.

Silverberg briefly recapped the issue elevated from TMT; she explained that TMT could not come to agreement on the Spring Creek Hatchery SOR submitted by the salmon managers. One complicating factor is the 2004 agreement between federal parties that would seem to preclude spill for the Spring Creek Hatchery release in 2006; at Wednesday's TMT meeting, the action agencies said they would not provide spill this year. Howard Schaller noted that the agreement was only between BPA, USFWS and the Corps; however, there are other salmon managers with a stake in this decision.

Silverberg read the question elevated from IT; she noted that this is, in the TMT's view, a policy question. Schaller said that, from the Service's perspective, this is a significant problem. When this agreement was reached, one of the understandings was that the corner collector would operate in a similar manner to spill; if there were deviations in performance, the agreement was that we would revisit the spill issue, he said. There were problems with corner collector operations in 2005; given the FPE differential, we feel, along with the other salmon managers, that spill is warranted in 2006.

Bob Heinith said this entire issue has been problematic for the tribes, because they were not consulted about the 2004 agreement and the no-spill decision. The Corps needs to have a direct conversation on this issue with the tribes, he said. The tribes believe these fish need to be protected; the reasons why are stated in the SOR. From a technical perspective, we feel this is a very important issue. The tribes do not have a policy representative at this meeting, Heinith added.

With respect to FPE, said Rock Peters, I was involved in the 2004 discussions. At that time, the only thing we felt we could comfortably do was a hydroacoustic evaluation. The Fish and Wildlife Service also decided to do some coded-wire tag evaluations as well, he said. We discussed, at that time, that we were going to be evaluating both survival through the corner collector and through all other passage

routes at Bonneville, he said. We recognize in the original agreement that we would be doing the CWT evaluations, including an evaluation of eventual adult returns, but we wouldn't have had this language in the agreement regarding problems with corner collector performance or operation if we didn't intend to use it, if necessary, said Schaller. And frankly, we don't feel the corner collector is giving the performance we expected when the agreement was made. Peters noted that the reason corner collector operations were curtailed in 2005 was because of concerns about TDG over the chum redds. And that's a problem in itself, said Schaller -- I would simply reiterate that we were led to believe that the corner collector FPE performance would be similar to the FPE we typically see during spill.

The group devoted a few minutes of discussion to the actual operations that occurred last year. The question, for this year, is what happens this spring, said Silverberg. With respect to FPE, the question is, is it a significant problem, and is it the metric we should be using? Peters asked. To me, we should be measuring survival and basing decisions on that, rather than FPE. We have seen very high survival through various routes of passage at Bonneville, and relatively lower survival through the Bonneville spillway, Peters said -- to the Corps, that's a concern. You're talking about direct survival? Heinith asked. Correct, Peters replied. We don't have direct survival for this population, Heinith observed -- all we have is FPE. I would add that it may not be possible to resolve this at IT -- it may be an issue for the executives, Heinith added.

Will there be much use of Powerhouse 1 this spring? Ron Boyce asked. We have six units available at PH2, Peters replied; all of those units will be screened. The units at PH1 will not be screened, however. In other words, we would be trading off spill passage for turbine passage, said Boyce. However, survival is actually higher through the turbines than it is over the spillway at Bonneville, Peters observed.

Bill Tweit said that, in Washington's view, the question elevated by the TMT has to do with FPE. That's probably right, said Heinith; another question is, what is the hydraulic condition at the corner collector, in terms of egress conditions, without spill? My understanding is that about 50 Kcfs spill is needed to provide good egress conditions. Is that true? Ruff asked. If so, that's a key point. Gary Fredricks said some spill is needed to provide good egress conditions from the Bonneville tailrace, but how much that spill matters in early March, before many predators are present, is another question. Given the cold water conditions and the lack of predators in the area, I'm not sure a lot of spill is needed, Fredricks said. I agree, said Peters -- this time of year, predation is unlikely to be a significant issue.

What this boils down to is the acceptance of data from a surrogate species for either survival or FPE, because we really don't have survival data for this group of fish, Fredricks said. Tweit observed that the Spring Creek hatchery fish form the backbone of both the treaty and non-treaty fisheries off the Washington coast; from that standpoint, we think that trying to achieve whatever standard we're working with -- in this case FPE -- is very important. It's pretty clear that the corner collector alone is not getting us the

FPE we're shooting for, said Tweit; this being the case, in our view, we do need to provide some spill this year.

Rick Pendergrass said BPA had been somewhat surprised that the Fish and Wildlife Service's requested spill in the SOR, rather than working directly with the other parties to the agreement. Schaller replied that shouldn't have been a shock – this situation was foreseen in the language of the agreement. He added that the SOR was produced by numerous salmon managers, who weren't a part of the agreement, not just the Fish & Wildlife Service. From our perspective, we have not diverged from the agreement, he said.

Hlebechuk observed that the TMT has been talking about a Spring Creek SOR for a couple of months now; it took a long time to arrive, and there was no certain foreknowledge that it would contain a request for spill. We have been spilling at Bonneville for 16 years in support of the Spring Creek release, Boyce replied – this request shouldn't have surprised anyone. I would add that I specifically raised the possibility of 2006 spill in support of the Spring Creek Hatchery release at IT a year ago, Schaller added. Primarily, what we discussed at IT was the hatchery reprogramming issue, said Ruff. True, but I also raised the spill issue at that time, said Schaller.

The discussion continued in this vein for some minutes before returning to the specific question elevated from TMT.

Given the perspective we've heard from most of the salmon managers, what is the action agency response? Silverberg asked. Peters noted that Spring Creek Hatchery is Corps-funded; the Corps is very concerned that these releases be as successful as possible. We are also concerned about what the data tells us about spillway survival, Peters said; my technical folks are very concerned about survival through the Bonneville spillway. We feel that the agreement between the Corps, Bonneville and the Fish & Wildlife Service should remain in effect in 2006, until we have adult return data from the CWT study. Given the fact that the hatchery is a part of our primary mitigation, we feel having no spill in 2006 is the most prudent decision, Peters said.

Pendergrass said Bonneville is in full agreement with the Corps. There was a deal struck, and we see no reason not to stick with it, he said. Lori Postlethwait said Reclamation has no position on this issue.

Given that response, said Silverberg, is there any further response from NOAA Fisheries? I have nothing to add at this point, except to say that, if people feel strongly about this issue, then perhaps it should be raised to the federal executives? asked Ruff.

With no IT member proposing to elevate this issue to the federal executives, today's conference call was adjourned. Meeting summary prepared by Jeff Kuechle, BPA contractor.